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By
LITTLE, BROWN & CO.,
BOSTON, MASS.

THE GOLDEN JEWEL

By
ANTHONY PARTRIDGE
Author of
"Passers-By," "The Kingdom of
Earth," "The Distributors," Etc.

CHAPTER IV.

A Murder.

DEANE, with the air of one who was an inmate of the house, found his way to the drawing-room, where Lady Olive was seated before the piano, playing softly. She rose as he entered, and came to meet him.

"I have barely a quarter of an hour, Stirling," she said. "It was too absurd of you to be sitting there talking to father all the time. Come and say nice things to me. Mother has gone upstairs to put on her tiara."

He held her at arm's length for a moment, looking at her. She was not very tall, but she was graceful, and she carried herself as the women of her family had done since the days of Elizabeth. Her face was a little cold, except when she smiled, and her eyes were large and brilliant. There was about her toilette and her features a sort of trim perfection, which left no room for criticism. She was considered, amongst those whom she called her friends, handsome rather than beautiful, and ambitious rather than affectionate. Nevertheless, she blushed most becomingly when Deane stooped to kiss her, and her face certainly seemed to lose for the time its somewhat cold expression.

"You are going to the Waldrons," she said. "I suppose," he remarked. "You look charming, dear."

She made a little grimace. "It's too bad that you won't be there. However, in a few days there will be all right. Now that our engagement is announced, everyone will send you cards, of course, for everlastingly. I don't expect to be much of a success. You won't smile a little doubtfully. 'You won't expect to be much of a success in that way, will you?' he asked. 'My afternoons, for instance, are nearly always occupied.'"

"You will not find me exacting," she said, with a reassuring nod. "I don't expect you to play the part of a social butterfly at all, and although we must be seen together sometimes, of course, I haven't the least desire to keep you dandling at my heels. Tell me, what has father been talking to you about?"

"He has been urging me to leave the city," Deane said, "and buy an estate."

Lady Olive looked thoughtful. "That is very interesting," she said. "What have you to say about it?" he asked.

"It depends," she answered, "very much upon circumstances. I am not sure that I approve of a man having nothing whatever to do. Besides, I have no idea how rich you are, Stirling. I think I ought to warn you that I am very extravagant."

"I am delighted to hear it," he assured her. "I should dislike a wife who wouldn't spend my money."

They were sitting side by side upon a sofa, and she toyed with her fan for several moments. Then she held out her right hand to him, and allowed it to remain in his grasp. For Lady Olive, this was distinctly a lover-like proceeding. She was not at all sure in her own mind whether such a liberty was judicious, having been brought up always to consider any display of affection as utterly bourgeois.

"It seems a curious question to ask," she said thoughtfully; "but, after all, it would be only affection to pretend that I was not interested. Tell me what your income is—about, Stirling."

"In round figures," he answered, "it is to-day, I should think, a trifle over twenty-five thousand a year."

She nodded approvingly, and yet without a great deal of enthusiasm. "We ought to be able to make that do," she said. "Do you mean that it would be as much as that if you gave up business? Perhaps you could give it up partially, and keep a few directorships, or something of that sort?"

"I could not give up my work at all," he told her, "for two years. I get a very large income from my company, and I have an agreement with them. Besides, my own interests are so woven up with theirs that I could not run the risk of having anyone at the head of affairs in whom I had not complete confidence."

She nodded. "That is quite reasonable," she admitted. "You get holidays, of course?"

"Naturally," he answered. "There was a short silence. Lady Olive was half inclined to wonder why, having possessed himself of her hand, he made none of the other overtures which she had always understood were usual. Deane, however, was in no humor for love-making. She had represented to him, only a few days ago, a part of his future life which was altogether inevitable, and which he could easily come to find pleasant enough, but just now there seemed to be a barrier between them. Notwithstanding Lord Nunneley's kindness, and his wife's approval, he knew very well that it was not only Stirling Deane who had been accepted as a suitor. It was the millionaire, the man of great affairs, the man of untarnished reputation. Dick Sinclair's threats were still ringing in his ears. He somehow felt that he was not even playing the game to be sitting there, holding the hand of this most exclusive young lady.

"You are a little quiet to-night," she remarked.

"Perhaps," he answered, smiling. "I am a little shy."

She was inclined to take his words seriously. There had been moments before their engagement when he had certainly looked at her in a very different manner, when she had realized that if she really did say "yes" to him, she might find herself in danger of having to submit to something a little more vigorous than the ordinary love-making she knew anything of. She had even made up her mind, with a faint blush, to submit to it—had grown to expect it. Somehow, although she would have found the admission distinctly humiliating, she was a trifle disappointed.

"I wonder," she whispered, looking down upon the carpet. "If you need—if you really need encouragement."

She felt a sudden thrill as his arm touched her, a sudden sense of his enveloping presence. Then the door opened, and she withdrew herself quickly. The countess came into the room, a curious replica of her daughter, except that her hair was gray, and the light in her eyes a little sterner.

"So sorry you are not going with us," she said.

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CHAPTER V.

A Debt Incurred.

A LITTLE stream of people came suddenly out from the dark, forbidding-looking building into the sunlit street. The tragedy was over, and one by one they took their several ways, and were swallowed up in the restless life of the great city. Yet there was not one of them who did not carry in his face some trace of those hours of gloomy excitement, some reminiscent shadow of the tragedy which had spread itself out in passionate life before their eyes. The most callous was conscious of a few minutes' unusual gravity. Some of the more impressionable carried with them the memory of that hot, crowded room, the air of tense excitement, the slowly spoken, solemn words, throughout that day and many days to come.

"And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul!"

There was one man who issued from the building and made his way into the street, who seemed altogether dazed. His lips were drawn tightly together, his eyes were set in an unseeing stare. It was not until he had walked fifty yards or so that he seemed even to realize where he was. Then he came to a sudden standstill, and retraced his steps. Standing outside the building which he had just quitted was a small electric brougham, in front of which he stopped. He glanced at his watch. It was a few minutes past 1 o'clock. All around was the great stream of city men and clerks, hurrying to their midday meal. Once more, as he stood with the handle in his hand, he looked back down the dark passage, guarded by a single policeman, through which he had come a moment or two before. The scene in the little court house spread itself out with almost hideous precision before his reluctant eyes. He saw once more what is certainly the greatest tragedy which the mechanical side of our everyday life can offer to the seeker after sensations. He saw a man stand up and listen to the words pronounced which are to deprive him of life. And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul!"

Deane turned to his chauffeur, "The Carlton," he said, and stepped inside. The brougham glided away, swinging in and out of the traffic, and ran smoothly along the Embankment, westward. Deane let down both the windows, took off his hat and placed it on the seat opposite him. Then he drew

a small fine cambric handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead.

"God in heaven!" he murmured to himself. "Twelve men, and not one of them could see the truth. Twelve men, all fools!"

He took a cigarette from a small gold case, and lit it with trembling fingers. Then he leaned out of the carriage window. "Stop at the Metropolitan, Richards," he ordered.

The man was just swinging into Northumberland Avenue, and he pulled up in front of the hotel. Deane went in hurriedly, and made his way to the smoking-room, exchanging abrupt greetings with one or two acquaintances. There he ordered and drank quickly a large brandy-and-ode. When he retraced his steps, he felt more composed.

"To the Carlton now," he ordered. "Harry, please. I fancy that I am a little late."

In the foyer of the restaurant, Lady Olive came slowly forward to meet him. She was beautifully dressed, and she wore her clothes with the air of one who has been accustomed to be clad in silk and lace from the days of her cradle. She had been waiting for so long that no one questioned her looks. It seemed even incredible that she was twenty-nine years old. One realized that she was of the order of women who refuse to grow old—women without nerves, untroubled by emotions, women who come smiling through the years, unconscious devotees of the essential philosophy. To Deane she had never seemed more desirable than when she greeted him with a slight upturning of her eyebrows, and turned to present him to another man and woman who were standing by.

"Mr. Deane is going to make the usual excuse, I know," she declared. "Let us anticipate him, and say nothing about our wait. We won't even ask whether it was a directors' meeting, or a message from the governor of the Bank of England. Stirling, this is my cousin, Mary Elstree, and her husband, Maj. Elstree—Mr. Deane. The others are somewhere about. What a tiresome person Julia is! She has drifted away over there with a lot of people whom I don't know. That is the worst of taking Julia anywhere. I think that she would discover acquaintances in an A B C shop. Do find her, Stirling. No, don't bother! Here she comes."

A tall, dark woman detached herself from a neighboring crowd, and came up to Deane with outstretched hands.

"My dear man!" she exclaimed. "How dare you look so cool and nonchalant! Do you realize that we are all starving? We have been waiting here for you for more than half an hour."

"I am sorry," answered Deane. "You see, you people here have taken to lunching so early nowadays. You make it hard for a man to get through any work at all in the city."

Early lunches have come in with the simpler life," Julia Raynham declared. "One has so many more hours to look forward to dinner, and so much more appetite when it comes. I suppose we must forgive you," she went on. "At any rate, you are better than my husband, who won't come out to lunch at all. He says that all restaurant food is poisonous, and I can't drag him away from the club. Why a man should put his digestion before his society, I can't imagine. I hope you will never be so ungallant, Mr. Deane. Shall we go in, Oliver?"

"If you will excuse me for one moment, Deane said, passing on ahead. 'I will just see that the table is all right. I telephoned to Gustave, but even a maître d'hôtel forgets sometimes.'"

He looked into the room, and nodded

to the presiding genius, who came hurrying up. The table was there, duly covered, and covered with the dark red roses which he had ordered. He turned to Mrs. Elstree and the others who were following her.

"I think we can go in," he said. "I hope you people have not lost all your appetites waiting for me."

Lady Olive looked at him a little curiously as she took the seat at his left, but by unspoken consent she whispered, "My dear Stirling," she whispered, "have you had a very trying morning? You look somewhat, as though you had been worried."

He hesitated. "Well," he answered, "scarcely that, perhaps. I had rather a bad hour or so. Things don't go always our way, you know, in the city, even when one is most prosperous."

"You are foolish to worry," she said calmly. "Half the people in the world spoil their lives by giving way to that sort of thing. I should have thought that your temperament would have saved you from that."

Deane smiled. "Remember," he said, "that I have been in other places when I might have been with you, and excuse me."

"You are much too gallant," she said, with a little laugh. "To argue with seriously."

"By the bye," Maj. Elstree asked, "has anyone seen a special edition? I wonder if the Rowan case is finished. I saw that I have been in other places when I might have been with you, and excuse me."

Deane set down the wineglass which he had just raised to his lips. "The verdict was given just as I left the city," he answered. "Rowan was found guilty!"

CHAPTER VI.
An Impetuous Demand.

THERE was a little murmur of interest. On the whole, although the result of the trial had seemed fairly certain, everyone was surprised. "Guilty of murder of manslaughter?" Maj. Elstree asked.

"Of murder," answered Deane. "There was not even a recommendation to mercy."

Lady Olive looked reproachfully at him. "My dear Stirling, you really shouldn't have told us at luncheon time. If I hadn't been so very hungry, I am sure it would have taken my appetite away. He was such a good-looking fellow, and he has been so brave all through the trial."

"Brave or callous, do you think?" Maj. Elstree asked.

"Brave, I think," Julia Raynham declared, leaning forward in her place. "I went to the trial the first day. He followed every question that was asked, and he was always making suggestions to his solicitor. I think when one understands like that, when one's intellect is working all the time, that you cannot call it callousness."

"I agree with you," Lady Olive declared. "I was there myself, and except that he looked so ill, he seemed quite indifferent, and completely free from nervousness. Yet I am quite sure that he realized his position. My dear Stirling, how thoughtful of you to remember the Howard American. I adore hot lobster, don't you, Julia?"

"Delicious!" Julia murmured.

"Wonder," Maj. Elstree said reflectively, "what must be the state of mind of a man who has gone through a trial lasting four or five days, and suddenly realizes that he is over and finished, and that he has lost. This poor fellow, for instance. When he woke up this morning, he perhaps hoped to be free to-night—things went altogether his way yesterday. And instead of being free, he has been taken back to his cell, and knows—even at this minute he is realizing—that he will never leave it again until he leaves it to die. Personally," he continued, "I think that the period of time between the pronouncement of a sentence and its execution ought to be swept away. I cannot imagine anything more horrible, especially to a man who has to spend the long nights alone with that one thought racking his brain!"

Lady Olive laid down her fork. "My dear Harry," she declared, "do be a little more considerate. How are we to enjoy our luncheon if we think of that poor man?"

Maj. Elstree bowed across the table. "I forgot," he said. "Let us enjoy our luncheon, by all means. At the same time, I am going to drink my first glass of wine to a reprieve. We don't discuss the question of whether he deserves it or not. We will talk instead, if you like, of directorships, and Flying Star's chance for the Gold Cup. But—I drink my toast."

"You are very quiet, Stirling," Lady Olive murmured to the man who sat by her side.

Deane smiled at her. "I am afraid that sometimes when I come away from a maze of figures, my brain or at any rate my tongue, is not so nimble as it should be. I'll keep pace with you all presently."

A frock-coated, white-waistcoated maître d'hôtel came smiling up and addressed him confidentially. "Mr. Deane," he said, "you are wanted for a moment upon the telephone."

"You are sure that it is I who am wanted?" Deane asked, a little doubtfully.

"Quite sure, sir," the man replied. The inquiry was for Mr. Stirling Deane.

Deane rose to his feet. "You will excuse me?" he begged, turning to his guests. "I suppose they have found out at the office that I am here, and they have probably something to say to me."

Nevertheless, as he left the room and crossed the hall, Deane was conscious of feeling more than a little puzzled. He was quite certain that he had not told a soul at the office of the Incorporated Gold Mines Association, over which he presided, that he was lunching at the Carlton. He was equally certain that he had not told anyone else. He took up the receiver of the instrument with some curiosity.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Who are you?" was the reply. "I am Stirling Deane," Deane said.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me? Is it the office?"

"No!" was the reply, in a voice wholly unfamiliar to him. "It is not the office, Mr. Deane. It is someone with news for you."

"News?" Deane repeated. "I should like to know who you are first, and to hear your news afterward."

"Who I am is of no consequence," was the reply. "My news is that Basil Rowan has been found guilty, and has

been sentenced to be hanged. The verdict has just been pronounced."

The receiver, nearly fall from Deane's fingers, he retained himself, however, with an effort. "Well," he said, "what is that to you or to me?"

"That is a matter which we will not discuss over the telephone," was the calm reply. "I rang you up to tell you this because I thought it was well that you should know quickly. I ask you now what you are going to do?"

Deane's was the face of a strong man—a man who scarcely knew the meaning of the word "nerves." Yet he felt himself struggling with a sudden sense of being stifled. Something seemed to be hammering at his brain. His breath was coming in little sobs. He answered the mysterious voice almost incoherently.

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"What do you mean? How can it concern me? Tell me who you are at once," he said.

"It does not matter who I am," was the reply. "You have no time to think about that. What you want to realize is that Basil Rowan has been found guilty, and that he will be hanged within a fortnight, unless—"

"Unless what?" Deane gasped.